

Natural and cultural resources task force meeting  
July 27, 2011, Birmingham (JFO)  
Tryon McLaney chaired

**Attendees included:**

Rob Grant, ADECA (recreation programs)  
Joe Watts, representing UA Center for Economic Development  
Jennifer Wheelock, Dept of Interior/LTCR by phone  
Ray Clifton, Alabama Forestry Association and Governor's Task Force for Forest Recovery  
Jose Gil Montanez, FEMA LTCR  
Kat Hardegen, FEMA environmental specialist liaison to LTCR  
Jessica Burr, FEMA historic preservation specialist liaison to LTCR  
Elizabeth Brown, Alabama Historical Commission  
Judy Sizemore, Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area  
Tommy Thompson, Governor's Task Force for Forest Recovery  
Ann Keller, EPA – Atlanta Office

**Forestry:**

The Governor's Task Force for Forest Recovery has completed several assessments, which are on the website [alabamaforestrecovery.com](http://alabamaforestrecovery.com). These include damage assessments by county, volume of acreage, volume of damage and value. It also includes estimated costs of reforestation, as well as other maps and data and agendas from the five public meetings held so far.

Forestry is the top agricultural producer in Alabama. The 12 million tons of damage is about 1/3 of the annual harvest. Only about 219,000 tons have been salvaged so far.

The volume of damage is similar to that destroyed in Hurricane Ivan. However, the damage is much more widespread and more devastating. Hurricane-damaged trees are usually whole and laid down in one direction, making them relatively easy to pick up and usable for lumber. Tornado damage creates "pick-up stick" piles of debris, and the damaged trees are useable for pulpwood at best.

The other challenge is the weather. Hurricane damage is often in the fall when weather is cooler and wetter, and when mills are building up inventory. The tornado occurred when mills already were full. If they saw boards from pines and the boards sit too long in the heat, they deteriorate and lose value.

Reforestation is a complex project. The landowner has to contact a professional and develop a prescription with a timeline for clearing, site preparation and deciding what to replant. The options are basically do nothing, do a little, or do a complete reforestation. If you do nothing, the forest will return. There is a problem with leaving debris because of the fire hazard. The first step was helping landowners salvage what was on the ground to generate what income they can. Next, we look at whether to replant or naturally regenerate.

The recovery committee is working to get information out as widely as possible on what resources are available for owners of forested land. The Farm Services Agency has funds which are handed by individual counties. Applications had to be submitted within 30, 60 or 90 days after the disaster declaration, and many people did not find out in time. Only 600 applications were received statewide, while we estimate about 2,000 impacted parcel owners outside urban areas.

The recovery commission has a website and has held public meetings. They are looking for funding for mailings to reach more people. They have worked with the Alabama Cooperative Extension Service to set up meetings,

and are coordinating communication among landowners, loggers and resource professionals. There have been some PSAs and news media.

To help landowners deal with the decreased value of damaged land, the task force is working with Dr. Tufts at AU to investigate possible tax credits. They have also contacted Sen. Sessions about the possibility of extending the Katrina tax credit which allows accelerated depreciation. This information is on the website.

### **Trees**

The Arbor Day Foundation is partnering on a tree replanting program for urban areas. Neil Letson with the Alabama Forestry Commission helped organize it. Donations can be made to the program and every dollar will be used for trees. They will work with local groups to plant them. The trees will be delivered around January 2012 to communities and groups, and technical assistance will be provided.

The Alabama Urban Forestry Association will be contacted for prospective partnership on the project.

### **Historical:**

The Cordova assessment was distributed. Cullman has also been assessed. The state historical commission will be assessing each of the affected communities.

LTCR has completed windshield surveys of the communities requesting LTCR assistance. They are compiling data and a resource list which will be distributed to the task forces. These will integrate with the ESF #14 plans. We are expecting completion in a couple of weeks.

Funding is an issue. The state has a small amount of funding left from the Katrina disaster which can be used to support some travel. However, we do not expect any special appropriation for this disaster.

The Hackleburg bank building was discussed. Only the façade and walls are left; the roof is gone. An individual has purchased the building and wants to develop a history center or similar project. It is the only building left; all the others, including those with a common wall, are demolished. It needs to be stabilized and a roof put on as soon as possible. PA funds cannot be used; they are only for buildings that were public before the disaster. She could possibly qualify for SBA funds. Dan Harris is working with the owner on possibly establishing a 501c3 nonprofit, which would qualify for grants. Jose will follow up on mitigation. Elizabeth said the historical commission has a funding block which could be accessed. Applications are going out Monday and are due Sept. 1. Jessica will give contact information for the owner and for Dan Harris to Tryon for him to make further contact.

There were some historic cemeteries in the disaster area. The Pratt City cemetery is significant from a funerary arts and historical perspective. There will be information about them in the survey packet. Cemeteries are eligible for historic preservation grants.

### **Resources**

The group informally discussed how to be sure that communities receive information about natural and cultural resources. José explained how the LTCR process works, with a community-wide visioning meeting followed by one or more planning meetings/charrettes. Hackleburg, Phil Campbell and Cordova are preparing for charrettes. Residents often mention that they want green space and parks, but they do not always know how to envision them or start designing. There are web resources the community could be advised of, or consider some kind of presentation or participation by task force members at the planning meeting. Matt McCollough and Neil Letson with the Alabama Forestry Commission would be good resources.

When the community plans are ready, the task force will be on line to provide resources. We want the task force to understand what different communities are discussing, so that we can start thinking about it. We want to be creative and make connections so the communities will have every resource available.

### **Volunteers**

There is still an army of Alabamians ready to volunteer. They could be mobilized to plant trees and help in restoration projects. Community residents can perform a lot of work, and they have demonstrated a commitment to handling their recovery. The task force and FEMA are here to fill the gaps.

The Master Gardner program can create an infrastructure for organizing and perpetuating greenspace and park projects.

It is important that the local recovery committees be able to tap into the VOADs.

### **Tourism**

We are looking into applying for an EDA grant for a tourism feasibility study for the northwest part of the state. Tourism provides economic development for a relatively small investment. The area has Native American history, textile, mining, outdoor recreation (passive and active), rivers and lakes, and even foodways. If we can connect the communities and attract tourism, it will add amenities to small towns and create an attractive area as industry is recruited for the I-22 corridor. The state tourism department is reviewing our request for them to apply for a grant to contract for a feasibility study. We should find out more in the next week or two.

### **Parks**

Rob discussed a program within the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) for disaster recovery. If a park was impacted which had previously received LWCF funding, the jurisdiction can apply for funds to repair it. There is a maximum \$50,000 grant and a local match is required which can be in-kind labor, donated materials or services. The grant period begins August 1. This year, there is a pre-application process requiring review before a complete application is requested.

### **New resources and next meeting**

Tryon will contact the National Geologic Service.

Someone from the U.S. Forest Service should be on the task force. The suggestion was the forestry task force member who works in the Bankhead district.

Need representation from Alabama Power and TVA (Jason Harper?)

Bring in Bonnie Durham of Appalachian Regional Commission. She works through ADECA.

A conference call was scheduled Tuesday, Aug 2 at 1:30 p.m. for task force partners to discuss their involvement in the community planning meetings.

Our next meeting will be in August, date and place to be determined. The Alabama Power Water Course in Clanton is preferred. We are expecting cultural resources reports next week and want to have time to review them. Between meetings, if action items arise, Tryon will contact the appropriate task force member about resources.